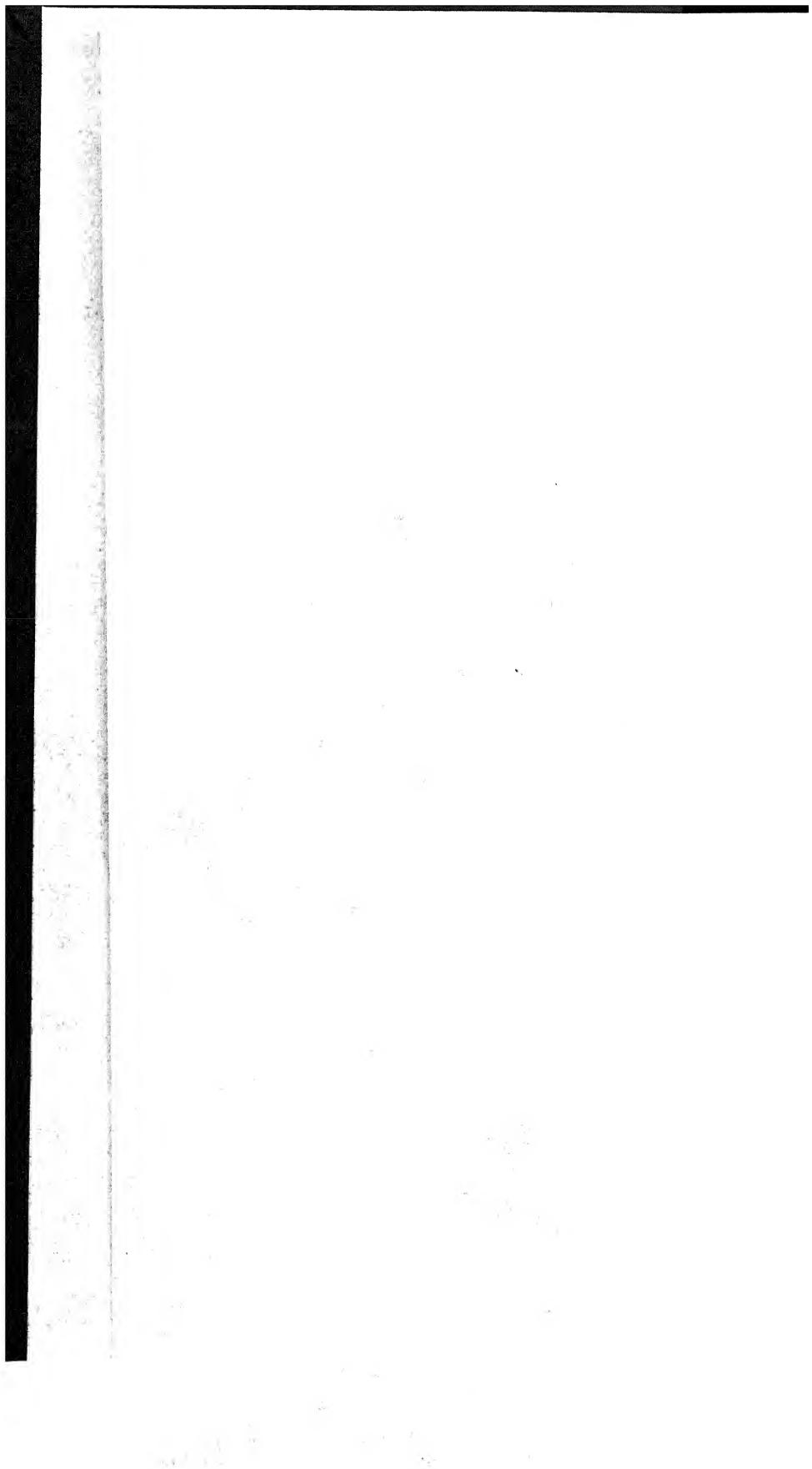

PREFACE

This book offers a wide-ranging new look at education in the humanities—the disciplines that study people's expressions and social institutions. My goal is to improve student understanding of how cultures operate and how societies function, by using advances in humanistic research and by rethinking some of the purposes of existing humanities training in our schools and colleges.

Humanities programs, particularly in history (in the schools) and English (in the colleges) are hotly contested at present, and the debates have spilled over into the public arena. This book addresses the debates, for they are inescapable and, in certain respects, potentially creative. But it explicitly seeks to establish a different basis for discussing humanities education by focusing primarily on the habits of mind the humanities should be establishing rather than merely the subject matter to which students should be exposed.

In this crucial respect, the book differs from several recent pleas for reason and tolerance that, though otherwise sensible, have not managed to move discussion to the proper plane.¹ It is important to stake out a new balance between traditional coverage of Western culture and our urgent need to understand African and Asian cultures, and the following chapters will venture another statement in this area. It is valid, also, to plead for a new dose of tolerance on both of the principal sides in the current war over the humanities.² But, as we will see, the bitter quarrels over whose cultures to teach profoundly misconstrue what should be the fundamental cast of the debate. Despite all the ink that has been spilled, we need a fresh start.

The central purpose of courses in the humanities is the inculcation of essential analytical skills that are not easy to define (because



MEANING
OVER
MEMORY

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MEANING OVER MEMORY

*Recasting
the Teaching
of Culture
and History*

PETER N. STEARNS

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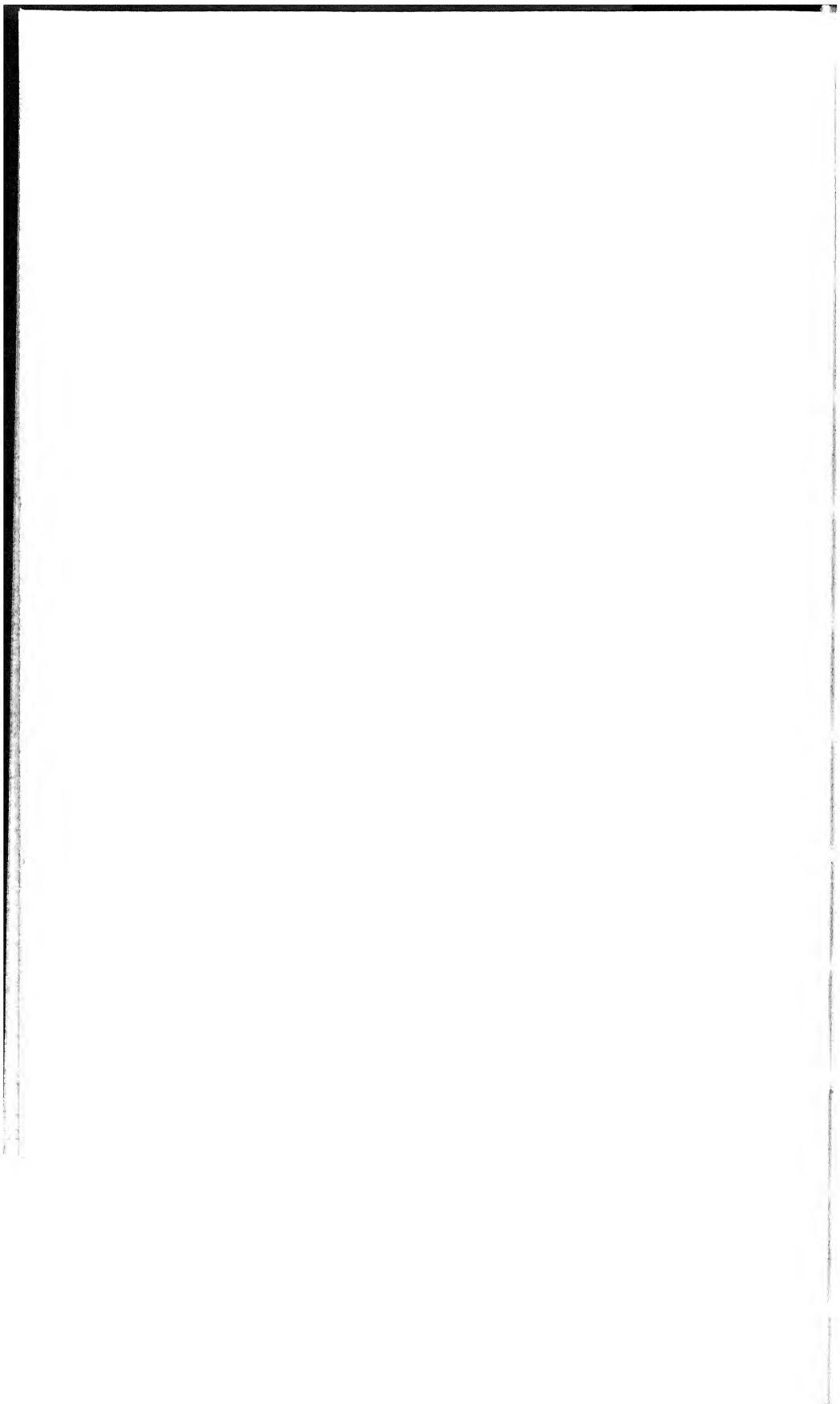
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